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Morning 'till Night, Cradle to the Grave: Laura Boulton, Recorded Sound, and Meaning in Music

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Part two, continued from Resound Vol. 26, No. 1/2

Bailundu Kingdom

Located in central-west Angola, the Bailundu Kingdom began around 1700 when Kariavala Civange, a member of the royal family of a neighboring kingdom, Cipala, took control of the area from local hunters. Over the next two centuries, the Bailundu Kingdom grew as it took on other dependent kingdoms, eventually ruling at least one third the area of Ovimbundu (Childs 1970:246). By the late 1880s, tensions over land, trade routes, and resources resulted in conflicts between some Ovimbundu kingdoms and the Portuguese. Trade routes began to be taken over by the Portuguese, which left many kingdoms unable to control and manipulate the movement of goods from other parts of the country and continent through Angola (Dias 1976). Between 1890 and 1905, the Portuguese used their increasing economic power as a means to establish a political conquest of the central highlands. Yet, even as the Portuguese encroached on their territory, many Ovimbundu kingdoms continued to prosper. One significant reason was due to the production of wild rubber, which accounted for 86% of all exports in Angola in 1903. Since the Ovimbundu controlled wild rubber, they were able to maintain their relative autonomy in the face of Portuguese conquest (Heywood 1987:357).

After the arrival of the Benguela Railroad to the central highlands in 1911, there was a shift toward

agricultural production, which also garnered substantial wealth for some people in Ovimbundu. Around World War I, the Portuguese colonial administration encouraged white settlement of the central highlands. The few settlers that purchased land in this area, however, could not compete with the Ovimbundu's less expensive maize and they instead started marketing Ovimbundu-grown crops. In 1933, the Portuguese supported individual ownership where Angolans could attain a title to land as long as the land was previously vacant and they used modern farming methods. Despite the success of some Ovimbundu farmers, however, the Bailundu kingdom had ceased to remain politically or economically important; many Bailundu migrated from the region to look for work in other areas; local leaders lost political power; and the status of the Bailundu kingdom waned.

By the time Boulton arrived in the central highlands, the Bailundu kingdom had fallen into disrepair. Boulton herself noted this collapse. In her first day in Bailundu on November 29, 1947, she wrote in her diary, "Poor Bailundu! Its former glory is gone -- except for the royal skulls buried in the . . . beautiful great *lemba* trees that mark the former boundaries of this great village." Even after noting this collapse, however, Boulton continued to view the songs that she recorded as unchanging traditions from the past. In referring to the Ovimbundu, Boulton writes, "But it is amazing how tradition persists among these peoples and how long memory remains" (1948:2). Though she recognized the potential influence of other cultures on the Ovimbundu, she also argued that traditions had ceased to change:

The Ovimbundu early became a dominating power in Angola, and their travel-educational system has maintained them through more than three centuries of European contacts, which have failed to eliminate the basic elements of their tribal life.⁵

Even though she realized that the Bailundu kingdom had collapsed due to colonial conquest, she continued to argue that expressive arts represented ancient traditions of local peoples.

Other scholars in the region around the time of Boulton's visit had a similar outlook. Wilfrid Dyson Hambly, an anthropologist, concluded his article on beliefs and traditions among the Ovimbundu in 1934 by stating: "Preliminary observation in some villages occupied by Ovimbundu is disappointing in its suggestion of Europeanization. The foreign culture is, however, a thin veneer, and further research shows a strong persistence of indigenous custom and belief quite near to centers of Portuguese influence" (Hambly 1934:167). Later scholars, however, saw interaction between Europeans and the Ovimbundu quite differently. In Adrian C. Edwards's book *The Ovimbundu Under Two Sovereignties*, he writes that, since the 1930s, "social change has rapidly dissolved most of the traditional institutions" (1962:127). Other post-1960s works would continue to question the narrative that the traditions, customs, and beliefs of the Ovimbundu were unaffected by the economic and political changes taking place throughout Angola.

One dominant theme connecting many Bailundu songs is the politics of engagement. Boulton's research among the Bailundu was during a period of political instability. The Portuguese administration, land settlers, and the migration of laborers to other areas of the country reshaped the relations of power among the Bailundu. Many songs, therefore, address this engagement with people and ideas impacting local ways of life. The song, "Ofeka Yetu ka yi Puapua Oku Lila" ["Our Country is Continuously Crying"] addresses the loss of the Ovimbundu areas to the Portuguese similar to "Kapalandanda wa Lilala" discussed above. Other kingdoms, such as Ndulu and Ngamba, are mentioned in the song as also crying for the loss of their country. In addition, the singer mentions forced

labor, a form of slavery that was introduced by the Portuguese to "circumvent the inconveniences posed by the banning of slavery" (Spikes 1993:8).

In the song "Nachilamba," the singer accompanies himself on the ochisanji, an mbira or sanza type instrument. The song addresses several issues but is strongest in lamenting the loss of land to Europeans and the requirement that people participate in agricultural activities.

Numerous other songs that Boulton recorded in 1947 address similar issues and highlight a growing tension among the Ovimbundu over social and economic changes taking place in the region. The loss of land to Portuguese farmers, forced labor, Christianity, migration to urban areas, colonial requirements for trade, and the perceived loss of power all play a part in the songs that Boulton recorded.

Other elements, such as variations in language and alterations of melodies and rhythms also emphasize the social movements that were taking place among the Bailundu. There were intense conflicts over resources, status, power, and ways of life. Indeed, the songs that Boulton recorded reveal a highly varied political climate in which people were both anxious about their situations and conflicted about the best means to create change. These

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Laura Boulton Collection

Chokwe masked dancers perform in an unnamed Angolan village in 1947.

Example 2

“Ofeka Yetu ka yi Puapua Oku Lila” [“Our Country is Continuously Crying”]

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Ove a mai ka puapua oku lila | Oh, mother, [the country] is continuously crying |
| Ofeka yetu we | Oh, our country |
| Va enda undalatu ka va pupua oku lila | Those who are forced into labor are continually crying |
| Oye ofeka yovindele okuetu we | Oh, my people, this is the country of white people |
| Ove a mai ha yi puapua oku lila | Oh, mother it is continuously crying |
| Ofeka yondulu ka yi puapua | Oh, the country of Ndulu never stop |
| Ame ko ngamba ka va puapua | Oh, Ngamba never stops |
| Ame Mbalundu ka yi puapua | Oh, Mbalundu never stops |
| Ame yo Chenge ka yi puapua oku lila | Oh, Chenge is continuously crying |

Recorded by Laura Boulton in Bailundu, Angola on November 29, 1947. Text transcription and translation by Maria C. Chikueka. Archives of Traditional Music accession number 92-317-F, EC 11099.11.

conflicts moved from positions of powerlessness where people argued that they should submit to the changes taking place (see “Nachilamba” above) to those who viewed the conflicts as anathema to the abilities of their former status as powerful economic and political centers. In the latter case, songs reflected positions of resistance, as in “Kapalandanda wa Lila,” in which people needed to take action against infringements on their ways of life. It was in these various moments of conflict that different views of the Ovimbundu peoples were expressed, debated, and sung. Rather than a single voice emerging—one tied to ancient traditions passed down through the generations—multiple memories, perceptions, and ideologies existed within these songs. While the songs could certainly be drawn from past traditions, their meaning in the context of the 1940s reveals a highly contentious and unstable narrative of people living in the Ovimbundu region.

Archives, Songs, and Ethnographic Research

As the number of items sitting in archives expands, scholars should continue to examine the ways in which these materials can inform us about music, people, and ideas of different places. Just as historians continually rewrite historical moments to have them make sense in a contemporary context, there is a need within ethnomu-

sicology and anthropology to reinterpret items resting in temperature and humidity controlled rooms. Carol Muller writes, “The archive is a place where we turn over things that no longer have a use value—that have been replaced by forces of novelty, fashion, and innovation—into the care of those we hope will keep them safe” (2002:409). As Muller rightly points out, in ethnomusicology, recordings are often left to linger as memories of the past without applications in contemporary contexts. The purpose of an archive, however, should not just be a sealed vault of preserved items, but a vibrant deposit that continues to inform us about human interaction, social change, and discourses of power in various periods and places.

Of course, the need to continually examine past scholarship does not end in the archive, but also applies to challenging ethnographic studies done in the past. For instance, several model anthropological studies, such as Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), Bronislaw Malinowski’s *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927), and Napoleon Chagnon’s *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* (1968), have been questioned for their veracity and accuracy over the years.⁶ This process of reexamining extant fieldwork materials is vital toward challenging our own assumptions and reformulating our knowledge of the past, in the same

Example 3

“Nachilamba”

Ofeka ya linga chilo ya male
Nena okatemo, hela ame ndi ka fela
Weya, weya, avoyo tu ka lima
Chovindele papa
Chovindele chivala Chikiandokala
Efuki lia punda yacho cha tunda
Ame elimeli ngenda avoyo kimbo lietu
Chovindele tuende
E chovindele papa avoyo tu ka lima
Ofeka ya linga talano ya male

The country is not ours anymore
Bring the little hoe, tomorrow I will dig
Oh, welcome, welcome, we shall plant
My father, she looks like a white person
The white people have given us a very hard life
The abuses of these people are innumerable
Oh, this year I go to our village
We are under the rule of the whites, let us go
We are under the whites, father, let's go plant
The country is not ours anymore

Recorded by Laura Boulton in Bailundu, Angola on November 29, 1947. Text transcription and translation by Maria C. Chikueka. Archives of Traditional Music accession number 92-317-F, EC 11099.4.

way that reconsidering materials held in an archive is vital toward reinterpreting historical moments.

This article's brief look at Boulton's Angola material highlights the continued usefulness of recorded sound in reexamining historical narratives, as well as in reassessing scholarly methods and perspectives of African music. Current theoretical approaches to music and performance provide a vibrancy to the recordings made in Angola as they situate the material in specific contexts and relations of power that were missing from Boulton's fieldwork. This reinterpretation of Boulton's work can be applied to many scholarly studies in the early periods of ethnomusicology. But, it can also be applied to more contemporary projects that seek to comprehend cultures and music in various parts of the world. If current theoretical approaches acknowledge the multivocality of any performance—the ability for many memories, ideas, and voices to emerge in a single performance—then certainly analysis by multiple scholars of a single event will lead to far more nuanced and illuminating studies. The need for reanalyzing expressive cultural forms will remain important for better comprehending meaning in the songs that people perform, and potentially reinvigorate materials held within archives.

Notes

⁵ Quotation found in an unpublished and undated article titled “Ovimbundu,” in Laura Boulton Correspondence, Papers and Manuscripts, Series IIIA, MC 1.38. IU Archives of Traditional Music.

⁶ The listed studies were critiqued by the following: Freeman 1999 (1983); Powell (1956; 1969), Spiro (1982); and Tierney (2005), though many other studies have appeared questioning these and other scholars' work. Several scholars have even been charged with fabricating their entire research (for example, see online critiques of Carlos Castaneda's work).

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